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Former NSA chief Inman: 'We're far short of skills'

Washington

In a speech to the Association of Former Intelligence Officers (AFIO) last Oct. 4, Adm. Bobby R. Inman, the former deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, lamented that the United States is not the world leader in intelligence gathering.

"We have some good organizations doing first class work," said Admiral Inman. "But for over 14 years, we drew down the size and cut back on the spending power."

"The education system failed to produce the people with the skills and the ability of linguists in area studies that would quickly give us the surge to deal with a whole range of burgeoning problems in the outside world," said the man who has long been regarded as one of America's most highly qualified intelligence officers.

"We did take advantage of new technology," the youthful-looking Inman told the former intelligence officers at their meeting in McLean, Va. "We're probably better at some things with regard to our principal adversary [the Soviet Union] than we've ever been before. But in a troubled outside world, we're far short of the skills and trained manpower, that we're going to need for the coming decade. . . ."

Inman declared that the Soviet Union was undergoing a leadership change and that the US knows far less than it should about those who are likely to rise to power in Moscow. He said that the Soviet ability to project air and naval power around the world had increased markedly and that this added a further element of worry.

The new leaders, the admiral said, "may be as cautious as their predecessors."

"But one must face the bleak fact that there is at least as much prospect that they will be more arrogant, without the same memories of the Germans on the banks of the Volga and [at] Leningrad — and more inclined to use that unparalleled power in ways inimical to the vital interests of this country."

In a Monitor interview, Inman added that, looking back, he realized a failing in US intelligence's analysis of the Soviet leadership. The error, he said, was in trying to divide those leaders along the lines that resemble American "hawks" and "doves."

Inman, who once headed the supersecret National Security Agency, the largest of the American intelligence agencies, said in his speech that the administration had put together a long-range plan that will add "substantial people and substantial dollars" to the intelligence agencies. But he added that sustaining support for that plan "is not going to be easy."

Inman announced at the AFIO meeting that he was resigning as a volunteer consultant to the Permanent Committee on Intelligence in the House of Representatives. His resignation was sparked by a report which one of its subcommittee chairmen, Rep. Charles Rose (D) of North Carolina, issued last month raising the possibility that high-level intelligence officers had done some political tinkering with intelligence reporting on Central America to make it fit Reagan administration preconceptions. Inman said that the subcommittee report had been issued on a partisan basis. The subcommittee's ranking minority member, C. W. Bill Young, a Republican from Florida, called it a "self-serving report" which could be shown to be biased.

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